

Public Transportation | Policy Paper



TranPlan 21

2002 Update as Amended in 2007

~~—2002 Update~~

State of Montana
Department of Transportation

Montana Department of Transportation

Public Transportation Policy Paper

Table of Contents



I. Introduction	2
A. Key Characteristics of Public Transportation in Montana	2
B. Key Challenges for Public Transportation in Montana	4
C. Importance of Public Transportation to Montana	7
II. Public Transportation Issues	9
A. Issues Raised By Citizens and Industry Representatives	9
B. Issues Arising From Existing Conditions and Trends	10
III. Policy Goals and Actions	14

I. Introduction



~~This paper is the TranPlan 21 2002 Update to the Montana Department of Transportation's (MDT) policy goals and actions for public transportation in Montana. This paper is the Montana Department of Transportation's TranPlan 21 policy goals and actions for public transportation.~~ As background, the role that public transportation currently plays in Montana's transportation system and the trends in the provision and use of public transportation in Montana are described. The key issues relating to the future role of public transportation in Montana's transportation system and policy goals and actions for addressing them are outlined.

A. Key Characteristics of Public Transportation in Montana

Public transportation is defined ~~in this paper (and by TranPlan 21)~~ in its broadest sense, to include all the passenger transportation options available, other than driving alone. This includes urban and rural transit, demand responsive transit for the elderly and persons with disabilities, passenger rail, intercity bus, commercial scheduled air service, and car and vanpooling. These components of Montana's current public transportation system have been examined as part of the *TranPlan 21* technical work.

Public transportation services are provided by the private sector, not-for-profit organizations, and various public agencies. Montana has experienced changes in the organization and provision of public transportation. For over 20 years, there has been a steady reduction in the public transportation services available and in the use of these services. The decrease in service has been most pronounced for intercity travel. In 1979, Amtrak ended service across the southern part of the state and intercity bus services have steadily declined over the past decade. This trend continues and a number of intercity bus providers have stopped operating. There is considerable uncertainty over the future of Amtrak service across northern Montana.

The following summarizes the key features of Montana's public transportation system:

Intercity Bus. Intercity bus companies provide service to and between Montana's major urban areas, despite a severe decline in intercity bus service in Montana over the past 20 years.

Urban Transit Systems. There are urban transit systems in Missoula, Great Falls, and Billings. These systems are used mainly by the transit dependent. Overall ridership has increased from 1.6 million to 1.9 million passengers between 1995 and 2000.

Rural Transit Systems. ~~Rural areas and cities under 50,000 population depend upon small urban and rural transit systems in addition to transportation provided through a variety of health and human service organizations. There are 11 rural public transportation systems in Montana. Two of these, Butte and Kalispell, are fixed route. These are funded under Section 5311(f) of the Federal Transit Act. These systems are operated by local nonprofit~~

~~organizations or local government, and provide demand responsive services to the public. In 2000, the rural transit systems carried 348,423 passengers, an increase of 68,358 since 1994. MDT is following recommendations made by the 2001 Montana Rural Passenger Needs Study and is using information from the study for the annual transit grant allocation process.~~

Rural areas and cities with populations under 50,000 depend upon small urban and rural transit systems in addition to transportation provided through a variety of health and human service organizations. There are 33 rural public transportation systems in Montana. Two of these, Butte and Kalispell, are fixed route. Helena Area Transit (HATS) has a combination of check points, demand responsive and fixed route. These are funded under Section 5311(f) of the Federal Transit Act. These systems are operated by local nonprofit organizations or local government, and provide demand-responsive services to the public. In 2005, the rural transit systems carried 454,042 passengers, an increase of 126,520 since 2000. MDT is following recommendations made by the 2001 Montana Rural Passenger Needs Study and is using information from the study for the annual transit grant allocation process.

Public Transportation for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities. Operators that provide services for the elderly and persons with disabilities are eligible for federal funding for capital expenses under Section 5310 of the Federal Transit Act. Historically, Montana has had an active, successful program and received the first Section 5310 vehicles in the United States. There are now more than ~~4675~~ recipients of Section 5310 funding across the state. In FY 200~~50~~, over ~~818,443~~~~41,000~~ rides were provided to elderly and persons with disabilities, a figure that has been increasing in recent years.

TransADE Program (Transportation Assistance for the Disabled and Elderly). This program provides operating grants, awarded by MDT on a ~~50/50-54/46 operating, 80/20 administration, and 80/20 maintenance~~ funding ratio, to eligible transit providers who serve the elderly and persons with disabilities. This ~~new~~ program is funded through vehicle registration fees~~an annual fee of 25 cents collected on each vehicle registration.~~

The Real Choice Systems Change Grant. ~~In 2003~~ The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services received federal grant money to develop a demonstration project titled “The Real Choice Systems Change Grant.” The vision for this grant ~~is was~~ to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public and human service transportation systems leading improved quality of life for the transportation dependent by:

- Providing coordination expertise
- Providing appropriate technological solutions
- Providing funding for selected systems change projects

~~The grants will be awarded early in 2003. The grants were awarded and the project completed. Helena saw an increase in ridership from participating in this project. No further grants concerning systems change are forthcoming.~~

Passenger Rail. Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, provides passenger rail service in Montana, which is a federally subsidized nonprofit corporation. Amtrak

currently operates across the northern portion of the state, providing daily eastbound and westbound service to 12 stations in Montana. In the ten years from 1990 through 2000, Amtrak ridership increased in Montana by 11 percent. Since 1995, traffic has increased by 15 percent state network-wide. Ridership has risen at Whitefish, East Glacier Park, Essex, and Belton-West Glacier stations. This is due to increased use of rail to access summer and winter tourist destinations and the growth in population in these areas. Tourist traffic to Glacier National Park drove ridership up to nearly 100,000 passengers per year. All but Whitefish saw double-digit growth from 1995 to 2000.

Scheduled Air Service. Despite the State's sparse population, Montanans have good access to air transportation. Almost all Montanans ~~are-reside~~ within a one county ~~distance~~ of an airport with scheduled commercial service. Air transportation services are usually provided by the private sector in response to market demand. Air transportation services to ~~seven-eight~~ Montana airports (Glasgow, Glendive, Havre, Lewistown, Miles City, Sidney, ~~West Yellowstone~~, and Wolf Point) are subsidized by the federal government's Essential Air Service program. There is some uncertainty over the future of this program and the criteria affecting the subsidy.

B. Key Challenges for Public Transportation in Montana

Montana shares with the Nation an overwhelming reliance on the private automobile for mobility; however, the state faces unique challenges to public transportation. Montana lacks the compact, dense population and development patterns that traditional forms of public transportation can most efficiently and effectively serve. Instead, the state is characterized by low population densities, widespread and scattered facilities and development, isolated parking problems, no severe congestion, and short journey-to-work times.

The following describes the major challenges for public transportation in Montana:

1. Dominant Use of the Private Automobile

The people of Montana overwhelmingly choose the private automobile for their mobility needs. This preference is growing; reinforced by increasing rates of automobile ownership, land use patterns, ~~low-energy prices~~, and more drivers making multi-destination trips. Many Montanans think of transportation in terms of the highway and their cars.

The trends in the availability and nature of public transportation have been shaped by this even greater reliance on the private automobile, which has reduced demand for public transportation and facilitated growth and development patterns that are difficult to service efficiently by public transportation. Montana now has one of the highest rates of automobile ownership in the nation. In many communities and rural areas, the only mode of transportation available is the private automobile.

2. Low Population Densities

Montana has low population densities and relatively small communities. This results in a small market for public transportation. Although parts of western Montana ~~are forecast to will~~ experience rapid growth over the next 20 years, the fastest growth will occur in rural areas adjacent to the larger cities. ~~These trends are~~ This is likely to result in ~~a~~-continuation of the low-density settlement patterns that are difficult to serve by public transportation.

Low population density results in travel demands in Montana ~~that are~~ that is not conducive to the traditional forms of public transportation such as buses, light rail, or subways. These forms of mass transit require large populations traveling along heavily used corridors through densely developed, compact areas with large employment sites. This dense form of travel involves a many-to-one travel pattern, with people traveling from many locations to one or a few sites of employment. Montana does not have such conditions. Compared to other states, Montana has few large concentrations of employment with few work sites housing over 200 employees. Most journey-to-work travel in the state is done on a many-to-many basis, with many people traveling to many dispersed locations or employment sites. In addition, it should be noted that journey-to-work trips represent a decreasing proportion of travel demand and the faster growing non-work trips are typically more difficult to serve by transit because they have scattered destinations and are not concentrated in peak hours.

3. Declining Ridership and Segmentation of the Public Transportation Market

Some modes of public transportation use in Montana are declining. There has been a decline in intercity transit and an increase in ridership of specialized services and urban transit. If these trends continue, public transportation in Montana will be targeted increasingly to particular groups or market segments with schoolchildren riding school buses twice a day, senior citizens and the disabled riding the social service van, and the remaining transit dependent segments, usually low income and those with no other travel alternatives, riding transit, where available.

4. Relative Attractiveness of the Automobile

The cost of travel, travel time, convenience, comfort, and safety are all factors affecting the relative attractiveness of different modes. In Montana, the trends associated with these tend to be in favor of automobile travel rather than public transportation.

~~Accounting for inflation, the cost of owning and operating an automobile increased only slightly by about 3.5 percent between 1995 and 2000 (American Automobile Association, "Your Driving Costs"). During this time, the cost of gasoline and oil fell by 4.1 percent. Driving is the most affordable, cost-effective means of transportation for the majority of Montanans. In 2007, the American Automobile Association estimated the average total cost of owning and operating a vehicle as 47.5 cents per mile. Despite the rising price of gasoline, it is harder to quantify areas of~~

convenience, comfort, and overall journey time (from door to door) it is difficult for public transportation to compete with the low cost and convenience of the automobile.

5. Land Use and Development Patterns

Butte, Billings, Helena, and many of Montana's other urban areas are much older and consequently were developed as more compact communities than newer cities in the West. Their earlier type of land use and development allows easy access by pedestrians and service by public transportation. Public transportation and pedestrian traffic go hand in hand because public transportation users, once their journey is over, must be able to easily complete their trip to their final destination on foot.

Montana's current development patterns, in both rural and urban areas, consist of dispersed growth that can only be accessed easily by car. Services and employment sites are no longer within walking distance of each other, so that several car trips are necessary to complete life-sustaining activities. New development is oriented to the automobile, with large set backs from the road, surrounded by parking lots, and lacking easy access by pedestrians and by public transportation. Much of this development competes with the older central business district as a trip destination, further reducing the market for public transportation.

6. Funding

Funding for urban and rural transit comes mainly from the federal government, local sources, and users. Restricted funding levels place constraints upon the level of service provided and the existence of services in many communities. ~~In addition, because programs such as Section 5310 and 5311 are federally administered, MDT has no authority to amend requirements to further statewide policy goals.~~ Programs such as Section 5310 and 5311 are administered consistent with federal statutory and regulatory requirements. federally administered. . Current MDT policies have been updated to require consolidation of local transit services in support of statewide policy goals. Current public transportation funding provides services to segments of the population in specific areas, at specific times, with extremely limited evening and weekend service. As a result, people who are dependent on public transportation have difficulty in leading the highly mobile lifestyle typical of most of their friends and neighbors. Employment is more difficult because work schedules and transportation schedules must coordinate.

7. Independent Behavior

The people of Montana value their independence and take pride in their western spirit of self-reliance, resourcefulness, and equanimity under difficult conditions. In common with most Americans, the people of Montana perceive that driving their own cars when and where they want is a right, not a privilege. Governmental mandates that would force people not to use their cars would not progress farther than the pre-planning stage, particularly when traffic congestion, development densities, and the inconvenience of using one's own car – all factors which influence people to leave their cars at home – are relatively insignificant. Most Montanans have short journeys to work and isolated parking problems, which limits the benefits to them from using

public transportation. However, this independence and self-reliance could be the basis for the development by the people of Montana of innovative, attractive public transportation services that would best meet their needs.

8. New Retirees and Aging Population

In common with the rest of the country, Montana is experiencing changes in the composition of its general population and its work force. In many parts of Montana, there will be a large increase in the elderly population over the next 20 years.

Areas of Montana are attracting retirees and, as a whole, the population of the state is aging. Senior citizens who move to Montana are active and have every intention of driving as long as they can. When they are no longer able to drive safely, the provision of services to a dispersed population of senior citizens will be difficult. In previous generations, senior citizens who could no longer drive depended on their families for transportation. This network is usually not available today.

C. Importance of Public Transportation to Montana

The importance of public transportation to the state's residents is probably best understood by the people and their families and friends who lack other modes of mobility. In a country dominated by the car, to live without a car is unthinkable, except in the most densely populated urban areas. In the past, a car was not so necessary to the maintenance of life because of family networks, functioning central business districts, fewer numbers of senior citizens, less consolidation of facilities (such as medical), and closer community ties. Today people and services are remote and access is not easy. Public transportation can fill the gap between people and life-sustaining activities.

As the earlier analysis showed, there is little competition between the car and public transportation today in Montana. Therefore, public transportation is most important to that segment of the population without access to a car. It performs a social role providing basic mobility for many Montanans.

The following highlights the current and future importance of public transportation in Montana:

1. Mobility for the Elderly and Disabled

Public transportation systems are particularly important for the elderly and persons with disabilities; two population groups that are growing in size in the state. Systems serving these groups are usually small, designed specifically for the needs of their target group of users, with limited availability to the general public. They serve the elderly and persons with disabilities well and allow people to maintain their independence and remain in their own homes, without being forced to enter an institution.

These specialized systems provide services:

- On a local city, town, or county intraservice area basis (i.e., travel to grocery store and other life supporting activities).

- On a regional interservice area basis (i.e., travel to regional medical center).

2. Access to Social Service

Public transportation plays an important role in linking social services and the people who need them. Often these people have no other means of reaching the services they need. Lacking transportation, they cannot help themselves become independent and self-supporting. The elderly, persons with disabilities, low-income people, and children at risk fall into this category. Social services accessed by public transportation are medical services, senior centers, nutrition sites, sheltered workshops, adjustment training centers, and others. Public transportation allows people to meet social service goals such as independence and productive community membership.

3. Basic Mobility for Montana's Residents

A minimum level of intercity services, urban, and rural transit play a key role in ensuring the connection between Montana's rural areas, smaller cities, and large urban centers. Even with low levels of service, this connection is essential for maintaining rural communities. In urban areas, it provides a basic mobility option for residents without cars and those temporarily without access to one.

4. A Tool for Managing Future Traffic Growth and Congestion and Improving Air Quality

In Montana today, public transit serves an entirely different market than the automobile. However, as parts of Montana continue to grow rapidly, public transportation can play an important role in meeting some of the new travel demands. In Missoula, transit and transportation demand management efforts play a role in improving air quality. Transit also provides a mode choice for individuals living in larger urban areas such as Missoula, Great Falls, and Billings. Transit in these areas also contributes to mitigation of traffic/roadway capacity and parking issues.

~~The TranPlan 21-2002 Update analysis indicates that Gallatin, Flathead, and Missoula Counties will grow at a considerably faster rate than the rest of the state. In these counties, there will be opportunities for expanding the role of public transportation in addressing travel demand growth. As the populations in urban areas of the State continue to grow, public transportation can be more effectively used as a tool in travel demand management.~~

II. Public Transportation Issues



A. Issues Raised By Citizens and Industry Representatives

In the 1995 *edition of TranPlan 21-edition*, citizens and industry representatives identified a number of issues concerning the current and future roles of public transportation in Montana. The overall sentiment *iswas* one that supports, in principle, a public transportation system in Montana and believes such a system is important for social and environmental reasons in addition to maintaining mobility.

The general issues identified were as follows:

- **Desire for a multimodal transportation system.** This sentiment is strongest in the urban areas of the state. While there is recognition that the automobile will continue to be the most important means of transportation, there is strong feeling that it is time to start providing alternatives where feasible.
- **Recognition of the social role of public transportation.** There is widespread recognition that the number of people dependent on public transit will increase in the future and strong feeling that a basic minimal level of transportation service should be provided where feasible.
- **Need to promote public transportation.** The availability and benefits of public transportation are not known to most Montanans and existing services should be promoted.
- **Desire to provide transit-friendly infrastructure.** In Montana's large urban areas, there is strong interest in meeting future transportation demand through increased public transit. Land use and design guidelines that facilitate transit use are considered important for success. However, there is strong skepticism about the cost-effectiveness of existing fixed-route systems for moving people.
- **Concern about the conditions of terminals, the lack of intermodal passenger facilities and connections.** The poor condition of terminals and facilities adversely affects the image of public transportation. This concern was most acute for intercity passenger terminals.
- **Concern about lack of coordination between systems.** There is concern about the lack of coordination between existing urban, rural, and intercity systems.

The *TranPlan 21-2002 Update-most recent* issue analysis *is-is* consistent with these perspectives. The following general conclusions regarding public transportation were drawn from the *TranPlan 21-2002 UpdateTranPlan 21* issue identification:

- **Position public transportation to reduce growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT).**

Montanans have different perspectives on the contribution that public transportation can make to reduce VMT. However, in those communities experiencing the most growth, there is a strong interest in planning for public transportation and facilitating transportation demand management.

- **Promote public transportation and transportation demand management.**

There remains a strong interest in many communities for MDT to continue to promote public transportation. This includes factoring public transportation into highway planning and project design.

- **Continued interest in passenger rail and concern over Amtrak's future.**

Montanans remain concerned about the future of Amtrak and are interested in identifying opportunities for rail to meet current and future travel demand.

B. Issues Arising From Existing Conditions and Trends

The following public transportation issues arise from the evaluation of recent trends, existing conditions, and practices as part of the *TranPlan 21* technical work.

- ***TranPlan 21* has established clear policy goals defining MDT's role in public transportation.**

MDT's current involvement in public transportation is through the administration of federal funding programs, the use of Surface Transportation Program funds, and the TransADE program. MDT's involvement is restricted to urban and rural transit systems and transportation for the elderly and persons with disabilities. In this capacity, MDT is helping to ensure minimum levels of mobility in rural areas and statewide for the elderly and persons with disabilities. This has expanded to providing transit to the general public in many rural areas.

MDT promotes intercity bus, passenger rail, and urban transit and supports transportation demand management. In addition, these providers are eligible for funding support.

The intercity bus industry provides the only means of intercity and intrastate travel for a segment of Montanans and it continues to decline. Private sector firms provide intercity bus services. MDT has evaluated the actions open to state government for ensuring a minimum level of service. MDT has concluded that the most effective role for state government is facilitating the use of bus and passenger rail by making these providers eligible for certain types of funding.

The extent of, and the rationale for, any state role in funding transit must be carefully considered. The federal and state role in highway funding is tied to the concept of functional classification, the higher the function then higher the priority. Because of this reasoning, local roads and streets do not receive federal and state funds. These are funded locally. By this logic, where public transportation serves a statewide or

regional function there is a clear “state interest.” This would indicate state interest in intercity and regional service providers.

There is, however, a state interest in having a certain minimum level of urban and rural transit to serve as a “mobility safety net” for Montanans and in having a strategy for preventing or reducing congestion in the future.

- **Public transportation is not well understood.**

Public transportation is not well understood and its benefits are not as easy for the public to identify as the benefits of a highway widening project or the construction of a parking garage. No exact dollar amount can be placed on the value of people being able to sustain their lives and move about independently. Public transportation is a complex issue because the community must reach a consensus that mobility for everyone is an idea worth supporting in a concrete and sustained fashion.

- **Need to recognize the constraints upon transit in Montana.**

The original *TranPlan 21*, in identifying issues, documented a strong public interest in public transportation and activities such as carpools, vanpools, or telecommuting for meeting travel demands and protecting the environment, especially air quality. However, there is little evidence to suggest public transportation can provide a substitute for Montana’s future automobile travel demands. However, growth forecasts indicate that public transportation can be of increased importance in Montana’s faster growing, more densely populated counties.

Population growth will itself create new demands for public transportation. As Montana’s population and large urban areas continue to grow, public transportation will have a role to play in meeting new travel demands but it will not remove the need for an efficient urban highway system. The opportunities for increasing the role of public transportation in meeting future travel demands will be greatest in urban areas and along the most highly traveled highway corridors.

Public transportation may offer opportunities to preserve air quality in Montana’s larger urban areas; however, public transportation can play a role in protecting air quality only if it is used. It is important to bear in mind that older diesel buses are heavy emitters of pollutants.

- **Need to identify opportunities for public transportation that will work in Montana.**

Urban transit does not serve Montana’s travel patterns well. When it attempts to do so, the resulting poor performance is used as evidence that public transportation is a waste of money and should be abolished. Urban transit operations carry about 1.2 passengers per service mile; rural operations are much lower with about 0.4 people per service mile. Rather than focusing on traditional forms of public transportation, the people of Montana should encourage more innovative uses of bus systems and identify opportunities for other forms of public transportation, such as vanpools or carpools.

There is interest in applying technique of transportation demand management to Montana such as carpooling, vanpooling, and telecommuting that are being used

elsewhere. MDT supports initiatives in this area. Where moderately successful nationally, these programs are targeted to the work trip in some of the densest and largest travel markets. There is little evidence to suggest that such measures would have much impact on travel demand in Montana's urban areas. However, there may be individual niches that can be filled by vanpools.

- **Importance of ensuring support for existing publicly funded transit.**

For a sparsely populated, large state, Montana has an extensive network of rural transportation service providers, as well as transportation service providers for the elderly and disabled. However, there is no consensus of public opinion that public transportation is a necessary component of a community's infrastructure, in the same category as water and light, sewers, trash disposal, and streets and highways. At the same time, taxpayers are disenchanted with entitlements and "rights" and are reluctant to pay more for the public good. In this environment, it is important to build community consensus and support for public transportation.

- **Accommodation of public transportation on the highways.**

It is important to remember that public transportation in Montana uses the highway system or, in the case of rail and air, depends upon the highways for access. Therefore, it is important to address public transportation needs as part of the project development process. This is most important in urban areas and selected corridors.

- **Continued decline in intercity bus industry.**

The continued decline in intercity bus service in Montana means that for a majority of communities there are no intercity travel options other than a car. Currently, 15.428 percent of Montanans live in counties not served by intercity bus. The service levels may decrease further if Greyhound Lines, Inc. ceases to operate in Montana. For people with no car, limited resources, and no family to rely on, intercity travel is impossible in many parts of the state.

It is not feasible for existing providers, comprised of small, specialized transportation systems, to meet intercity travel needs. Rural communities have limited budgets and have vehicles only for local service. There are some regulations that prevent intercity travel. Therefore, some senior citizens have no options, except car or ambulance, to get to the regional medical center two hundred miles away.

- **Performance goals and standards for public transportation.**

MDT has implemented a system for managing public transportation that provides performance measures such as passengers per mile, and cost per mile to provide improved information for public transportation.

- **Need for improved coordination and cooperation between providers.**

Coordination of services can bring more service to users and provide for more efficient use of resources. This was identified as a significant issue in the original *TranPlan 21* and remains an important issue for Montana in 2002. Cooperation between public transit needs and private transportation systems inevitably leads to issues about

regulations. Often these state and federal regulations prevent coordination of services.

For example, senior citizen transportation services cannot provide rides for clients of the adjustment-training center and certainly no one rides a school bus except children involved in school related activities.

Coordination and information sharing about transportation activities and transit services for specific segments of a community are lacking, and transit providers have difficulty in sharing resources such as vehicles, staff, maintenance, and funds. The newly required consolidation of services should improve coordination and information sharing in many rural communities.

III. Policy Goals and Actions



This section outlines updated policy goals and actions for MDT's role in public transportation.

POLICY GOAL A: Promote and support increased use of public transportation systems.

Action A.1. Support local promotional/educational programs to publicize public transportation opportunities.

~~This action supports local efforts to publicize the availability of public transportation and encourage its use. This action includes MDT coordination with and support of local efforts to publicize the availability of public transportation and encourage its use.~~ A major emphasis in the program will be on changing people's attitudes about public transportation and then their actions. Potential riders will have to be educated on how to use the available services and reassured as to the service's safety, reliability, and convenience. Promotional activities should communicate "what's in it for me" to the potential rider in the most specific terms.

Action A.2. Ensure highway improvements address public transportation needs.

This action considers transit infrastructure needs in advance project planning and design. Including public transportation in the initial stages of urban highway improvement projects makes public transportation an integral part of the area's transportation network and reduces the need for expensive and disruptive retrofits of the street and highway network. Bus pullouts, sidewalks, and park and ride lots are easier to build as part of a highway project than add later. The recommendation is applicable to fixed route systems. In urban areas, fixed route transit system needs should be included in metropolitan planning organizations and urban area long-range plans. When applicable, MDT will coordinate with local entities to ensure highway improvements address public transportation needs.

Action A.3. ~~Continue to provide state-level funding support for transit by providing a fixed amount of funding for rural transit systems "off the top" of Surface Transportation Program funds, and transfer Urban Highway funds to transit at the request of local governments.~~ Transfer Urban Highway funds to transit at the request of local governments.

~~This action uses Surface Transportation Program to provide a mechanism for making flexible funding available to rural transit systems. The transit providers will be required to meet the required match for capital funds and to meet operating costs. To meet the match, providers will require local funding.~~

This action item has been updated to reflect current conditions. MDT no longer uses Surface Transportation Program funds to provide a mechanism for making flexible funding available to rural transit systems. This is in response to the 239% growth in rural general public transit funds made available in SAFETEA-LU. However, MDT continues to transfer Urban Highway funds to transit at the request of local governments.

Action A.4. Coordinate state planning, urban area and transit system development planning, and management.

~~There is already a good level of coordination.~~ This action will ensure further coordination between planning and management of the highway and transit systems by increasing transit agency participation in urban area planning, either through participation on policy committees or more involvement in technical committees. In turn, there will be state interest in the transit development planning undertaken by the transit systems. Where applicable, efforts should be made to coordinate with local transit systems planning and management. These transit plans should offer mechanisms to evaluate transportation demand management and innovative service initiatives in Montana's urban areas. In addition, transit development plans should identify any associated highway improvements necessary for enhancing transit.

Action A.5. A Continue to assist communities to establish transit systems to meet future travel demands.

This action involves MDT working with the fastest growing communities, such as Bozeman, to establish transit systems. ~~The focus should be on proactive planning in those areas in which transit will become a viable element of a multimodal transportation system due to the growth anticipated in the next 10 to 20 years.~~In an effort to assist communities in leveraging available funding to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of their transit systems, MDT requires applicants for transit funding to submit consolidated transit plans. This encourages agencies to access and use federal health and human services match funds and provides enhanced service quality for areas previously covered by overlapping providers. All providers must submit consolidated plans.

Action A.6. Monitor and report on transit system performance using the public transportation management system.

This action involves MDT using the public transportation management system to provide information on the performance of transit systems in Montana. This system establishes minimum service goals against which performance and transit needs are measured.

POLICY GOAL B: Preserve existing intercity public transportation service and encourage/facilitate the development of new services.

Action B.1. Promote the use, and communicate the availability, of Section 5311(f) funds for intercity passenger service.

This action involves MDT informing potential providers of intercity passenger service of the availability of Section 5311(f) funds for eligible projects. The intent of this action item is to make communities and providers aware of this funding source and ~~that MDT's priority in allocation is intercity passenger service.~~encourage increased regional coordination of intercity transit.

Action B.2. Support the provision of intercity bus service through TransADE.

This action involves making Transportation Assistance for the Disabled and Elderly (TransADE) funds available for intercity service. Implementation will require including intercity service as an eligible use of funds.

Action B.3. Work to improve intermodal passenger facilities.

This action continues the consideration of funding for improved passenger rail and intercity bus facilities under Section 5311(f). Many of the state's rail and bus stations are in poor condition. Improvements can make public transportation more attractive and increase its patronage. The action will require working with Amtrak, airports, and intercity bus providers.

Action B.4. Coordinate with Amtrak, the Congressional delegation, and others to facilitate increased use of rail and preserve existing service levels.

This action involves MDT continuing to maintain a working relationship with Amtrak and others to identify state actions that may increase the use of Amtrak and preserve existing levels of service. There has been a decrease in passengers using stations in eastern Montana and Federal support for Amtrak is in jeopardy.

Action B.5. Ensure that Montana's interests in maintaining current and expanding passenger rail service are addressed in any national decision-making concerning increased Amtrak service.

This action involves tracking national initiatives to maintain and increase passenger rail and ensuring that Montana's interest in preserving and expanding service is pursued aggressively.

POLICY GOAL C: Work to improve service to social service passengers and the transportation disadvantaged—the elderly, children at

**risk, low income, and persons with disabilities—through
facilitating interagency coordination funding consolidation.**

**Action C.1. Improve state agencies and local provider cooperation in funding
coordinationconsolidation.**

~~This action will involve all state agencies reporting expenditures on passenger transportation. This offers an opportunity for improving the effectiveness with which public transportation dollars are spent. The action may involve legislation that requires all agencies to report this expenditure. The MDT could then use this information to identify opportunities for coordinating social service passenger transportation programs. Consolidation of local funds, rather than coordination, through contract agreements or MOUs/MOAs, allows local operating agencies to leverage available resources.~~

Action C.2. Use TransADE funding as a medium for improved coordination.

The need for improved coordination is a persistent problem. Various state, local, and non-profit social service organizations provide transportation services beyond those funded through the MDT's programs. There is only a limited amount of coordination between these agencies. This is because many of the agencies do not consider themselves to be in the business of delivering transportation services. This action uses TransADE as a mechanism for improving this coordination and avoiding the duplication of funding and overlapping functions. This could result in the increased utilization of existing equipment, improve service, and make for a more effective use of public dollars.

Action C.3. Continue to Work with the Public Service Commission to facilitate easier entry into passenger service provision (especially Medicaid transportation).

This action will identify opportunities for reducing regulations, without jeopardizing safety and reliability, and streamline procedures for providing service. The initial intent of this action item was achieved with the passing of HB 273 by the 2005 legislature which removed barriers to entry. The intent of this revised action item is to ensure that similar or new obstacles do not arise.

**POLICY GOAL D: Identify and implement transportation demand
management actions that will work in Montana.**

Action D.1. Continue to work with metropolitan planning organizations and urban areas to include demand-side strategies in their plans.

This action supports existing planning efforts and encourages Montana's urban areas to work with the transit systems to identify and consider demand-side strategies applicable in Montana as part of their urban area planning. A number of these plans address transportation demand management. The action involves MDT, through its participation on the policy and technical committees and the development and distribution of "TDM Tool Kit" supporting work, to establish innovative transportation demand management solutions.

Action D.2. Work with other state agencies to develop a transportation demand management program for state government.

This action involves MDT's ongoing support for transportation demand management in state government. The MDT participates in and encourages the most effective approaches for state employees. State government is the largest employer in Helena and has many single large employment sites that are more conducive to transportation demand management. The program should be long-range in perspective and involve incremental implementation. If participation is low and trip reduction minimal, the program should be terminated.

Action D.3. Support the implementation of rural ridesharing.

This action involves MDT continuing to support rural ridesharing programs. Nationally, most ridesharing has been developed as a congestion management strategy. This action involves supporting ridesharing programs in rural areas as an approach to meeting basic mobility needs. Such actions include continuation of the promotion of consolidated transit services and use of interagency forums to develop rural ridesharing programs.